What we can learn from teaching translation

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“fancy”?
Talk

• Translation in HE
• New GCSE and A-level specs
• Bridging gaps
• Objectives of teaching translation into the FL
• ....into English
• Summary and discussion
Translation in HE: overview

Ab initio stream

1st year:
English sentences into FL
FL text into English
and English text into FL (=corresponding texts)
FL set texts to be translated into English

Post A level stream

1st year:
English sentences into FL
unseen FL text into English

2nd year:
Translation of passages from English into FL

3rd year abroad:
Translation project as option

4th year:
Translation into both directions
Ab initio German examination (after about 100 hours of teaching)

(b) Translate the following sentences into GERMAN:

(iii) Although space travel will be very expensive, the interest in it is already massive.

(iv) Technology will probably make it possible for us to have an artificial tropical holiday paradise round the corner.

(v) In the past, many people never travelled at all, in the future they might travel to the moon.
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Ab initio examination
The poetry slam is a US import that young Germans have found extremely attractive. Slam nights in Berlin – the capital of the German scene – are chaotic and lively. Not only do the new poets present their poems and stories, the audience also gets involved by making loud noises.

Since this new version of the traditional poetry reading arrived in Germany the slam has become a hit. There are at least eight regular slams in Berlin every month, and the bigger ones – like the “Bastard Slam” and the “Kreuzberg Slam” – had to move to theatres and factory halls to find room for their audiences. The annual Berlin championship is now held in the “Volksbühne”, a famous theatre.
Ab initio examination


Translation in HE: why do we use it?

Skills:
Search: Using texts as quarries

Flexibility: Paraphrasing in both languages

Accuracy: Manipulation of grammar
Translation in HE: why do we use it?

Skills:
Search: Using texts as quarries
→ Caters for a certain type of learner, uses natural curiosity of learners

Flexibility: Paraphrasing in both languages
→ teaches agility in the FL AND teaches learners to use English more precisely (the best kept secret of FL skills?)

Accuracy: Manipulation of grammar
→ Making changes and dealing with the consequences
Translation in HE: example 2 – 2\textsuperscript{nd} years

http://www.mml.cam.ac.uk/call/german/translation/scm30/exam1999/default.html
Translation in HE: why do we use it?

Skills:

Using common sense

Predicting problems (the usual suspects)

Expanding vocabulary and awareness of style
Translation in HE: why do we use it?

Skills:

Using common sense
→ “air conditioning and lobster”: finding (cultural) synonyms

Predicting problems (the usual suspects)
→ Diagnosing one’s own weaknesses and knowing where to find help
[the use of footnotes: learning through teaching]

Expanding vocabulary and awareness of style
→ Discussing and comparing alternatives
Translation in HE

Examining translation allows us to develop lots of skills in the class room:

• Curiosity (close reading)
• Flexibility (FL and L1)
• Accuracy (grammar)
• Using common sense (contextual knowledge)
• Diagnosing problems (learning how to learn)
• Expanding vocab and style
GCSE
• Fr, Ge, Sp: from 2016; 1st exams 2018
• Others: from 2017; 1st exams 2019
• (But due to threat of withdrawal of some ‘smaller’ languages: some old specs may continue for a further year while solutions sought)

GCE A levels
• Fr, Ge, Sp: from 2016; 1st exams 2018
• It, Rus, Ch: from 2017; 1st exams 2019
• (Due to threat of withdrawal of all others: old specs may continue for a further year while solutions sought)

thanks to Jocelyn Wyburd for letting me use her slides
GCSE and A level reform: content

GCSE
Translation into and out of the assessed language in sentences for Foundation tier and short passages at Higher tier

A level
Translation into and out of the assessed language, various exercises
A level reform: content - translation

Edexcel: passage in FL (100 words) for translation into English and passage in English (100 words) for translation into FL

OCR: passage in FL (100 words) for translation into English and passage in English (100 words) for translation into FL

AQA: Passage in FL plus related English passage (100 words) for translation into FL and passage in FL (100 words) for translation into English
Bridging gaps, from school to university

As an example:

http://www.myheplus.com/

French
German
Italian
Portuguese
Spanish
(more to come)
Translation in the classroom: activities

- Wrong translations – how to reconstruct what went wrong and why
- How to use dictionaries, using ‘chunks’
- Comparing different versions of professional translations
  Comparing different versions of translations by peers
- Discussing “issues” of translating: cultural awareness
  Discussing “untranslatable” words/concepts
Translation in the classroom: activities

“Ein ungeheures Ungeziefer”? 
Translation in the classroom: activities

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Download Resources

- Activity 1 - Machine Translation.pdf
- Activity 2 – The Dangers of Dictionaries.pdf
- Activity 3 – Translating Kafka.pdf
- Activity 4 – Translating Harry Potter.pdf
- Activity 5 – Try Some Translation!.pdf
- Answers.pdf
- Useful Links.pdf
What is the purpose of translating FL into English?

“It makes me read the text more closely.”
Can underpin reading comprehension.

“It helps me understand the meaning of words in context.”
Can support vocabulary expansion.

“It helps me understand constructions used in context.”
Consolidates grammar knowledge.

“It helps me understand the use of English.”
Supports the knowledge of your own language.
What is the purpose of translating FL into English?

If sentences used in an authentic text in the FL have been understood through translation, it can encourage learners to use these expressions in their own writing with confidence.

The way to improve style and idiomatic use is through copying!
What is the purpose of translating into the FL?

Learner:
“Translation tells me what I don’t know.”
→ Using translation as a diagnostic tool.

Teacher:
“I can test specific vocabulary and grammar.”
→ Using translation as a way to steer text production.
What is the purpose of translating into the FL?

Translation as diagnostic tool:
http://lcitc.langcen.cam.ac.uk/german/jtgrammar/grbase.php

Just in time grammar
What is the purpose of translating into the FL?

Steering text production, possible dangers:

• Problems of using isolated sentences
• Artificiality of the exercise
• Forcing learner to stay in the domain of English

Useful if

• used in context
• alternatives are allowed
• the purpose is transparent
In multilingual, multicultural societies [...] and in a world of constant cross-linguistic and cross-cultural global communication, there are reasons to see translation as being widely needed in every day situations, and not as a specialized activity at all.” (Cook 2010: 109)
For the successful language learner, bilingual knowledge is always implicated in monolingual use, and it makes little sense to think that one can exist without the other. For these reasons I do not accept a neat division between translation as a means and an end. (Cook 2010:xx)
Translation Competence:

• Communicative and textual competence in at least two languages and cultures
• Cultural and intercultural competence
• Subject area competence
• Professional and instrumental competence (use of documentary resources)
• Attitudinal or psycho-physiological competence (self-concept, self-confidence, attention/concentration, memory, initiative)
• Interpersonal competence (team work; negotiation skills)
• Strategic competence (organizational and planning skills, problem-solving, monitoring, self-assessment and revision)

(Kelly 2005: 32-33)
Translation in HE: what next?

Developing materials for the use in class room teaching:
Collaboration with Oxford’s Sir Robert Taylor Society

26th May 2016: Conference in honour of Anthea Bell
Confirmed speakers:
Cornelia Funke
Julia Franck
Jan Costin Wagner

Supported by Magdalene College,
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Routes into Languages

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